Extreme size variation in the hoverfly *Episyrphus balteatus* (Degeer) (Dip.: Syrphidae)

This very common hoverfly is particularly characteristic, with its double, black bands on tergites 3 and 4, but these abdominal markings can be extremely variable. It also varies tremendously in its size: Stubbs & Falk (1983, British hoverflies: an illustrated identification guide. BENHS) give a wing length of from 6 to 10.25 mm. In a collection of set specimens, such variation is easy to overlook; relative proportions and overall appearance seem much more important to the entomologist's eye. But seeing them next to each other in nature can be quite a jolt, as was brought home to me when I took the accompanying photograph. On 8 August 1997, several hogweed umbels on the wayside of a small parking place near the National Trust reserve at Frithsden Beeches (grid reference SP 998110), Buckinghamshire, were dripping with hoverflies. Many dozens of Episyrphus balteatus, Scaeva pyrastri (L.) and Eupeodes luniger (Mg.) were jostling together in the sultry morning warmth. After taking a few general photos I noticed two dramatically different specimens of Episyrphus (Figure 1). The original 35mm slide was taken at a magnification of approximately life-size; thus, the lightly-marked male, to the left, has a wing length of about 10mm, whilst the heavily-marked but diminutive female to the right has a wing length of only about 6.5mm.- RICHARD A. JONES, 135 Friern Road, East Dulwich, London SE22 OAZ. (E-mail: bugmanjones@hotmail.com).

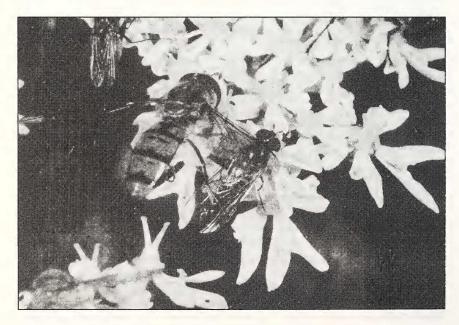


Figure 1. Size variation in Episyrphus balteastus (Degeer).